DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 308 EA 019 389

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TITLE How Women Principals Respond to Conflict: A Qualitative Study.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrators; Conflict; *Conflict Resolution; Elementary Secondary Education; *Females; *Interpersonal Communication; *Principals; *Sex Stereotypes; *Women Faculty

ABSTRACT

Women frequently encounter stereotypes concerning their conflict management skills when seeking administrative positions. So far, the literature has focused on conflict management models involving male subjects and male researchers. As women's representation in educational administration increases, traditional viewpoints and theories concerning women need to be reevaluated. This study explores women principals' specific strategies of conflict management by using a qualitative "multiple realities" methodology. Particular respondents were included for their skill at handling conflict. Findings are based on in-depth, open-ended interviews and observations of six elementary and secondary school women principals. The data reveal two types of conflict experienced by these principals: conflict thrust upon them and conflict initiated by them. In both cases, the principals' actions are guided by the desire to preserve interpersonal relationships. When conflict comes from without, the principals try to diffuse it through empathizing, asking questions and accommodating, using humor, giving the other person a "way out," and listening. When the women principals initiate conflict, they use a stimulation strategy promoting escalation toward a specific goal--usually to encourage positive experience, such as generating new ideas and dispelling apathy. Observed conversations and principals' responses are included throughout the paper. (MLH)

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HOW WOMEN PRINCIPALS RESPOND TO CONFLICT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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March 1987

AERA '87

EA 019 389

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How Women Principals Respond to Conflict:

A Qualitative Study

Introduction

Women aspire in increasing numbers to administrative positions. As the 1985 statistics of the American Association of School Administrators indicate, 26% of educational administrators in the United States are women as compared to 15% in 1976.

One of the major obstacles to women's attaining such positions is the existence of stereotypes concerning women's lack of administrative skills, specifically conflict management. There is a paucity of research on women and conflict management in educational administration. The scant amount that has been accomplished has focused on males and has been generalized to all people. Moreover, most of the models of conflict management used in these studies have been formulated from research using predominantly male subjects and completed by male researchers. As the population of women in educational administration increases, it seems to be incumbent upon researchers to reevaluate traditional viewpoints and theories concerning women. This study is a beginning toward understanding women and conflict management in educational administration.

The purpose of this study is to explore the female response to conflict by women principals. It addresses the following

research question: What specific strategies of conflict management do female principals utilize?

The methodological design for this paper is the qualitative approach which focuses on the "multiple realities" of responses to conflict. Since the intent of this researcher is to explore the approaches of conflict management utilized by female principals, particular respondents were included in this study because they were believed to facilitate the development of an understanding of the skill of handling conflict. Data are obtained in both elementary and secondary settings by means of open-ended, indepth interviews and observations of each of six female principals.

The researcher hopes to provide additional information, which not only will assist women to assess their conflict management styles, but also will assist women and men to understand women's behavioral approaches to conflict within the educational administration milieu.

How Women Principals Respond to Conflict

Overall, women seem to use conflict strategies which do not threaten relationships. Gilligan (1982) indicates that female socio-emotional maturational development is along the lines of relational complexities, i.e. relationships with others. Women choose to preserve relationships rather than risk separation from others (Gilligan, 1982; Kaplan and Yasinski, 1984). Thus, they are likely to display an interest in maintaining interpersonal relations.

Concurring with Gilligan (1982), Kanter (1977) and Keown and Keown (1982) find in their studies of females in organizational settings that women tend to be more relationship-oriented. They appear to possess a more accommodating rather than an autocratic manner. Even early childhood training within a family or educational setting has nurtured the female concern for relationships (Pitcher and Schultz, 1983). These researchers speculate that girls are directed more toward playing house and school, rather than fanciful activities, which influences them to treat people and problems more seriously. The data in this study appear to bear out the indications of Gilligan (1982) and others who emphasize the influence of an interpersonal relational framework in women's behavioral choices.

The interview and observation data reveal that women principals experience two types of conflict. First of all, there exists that conflict which is thrust upon them and to which they

respond. Secondly, there is that conflict which they initiate or stimulate. In both cases, it is the preservation of interpersonal relationships that guides their response. When conflict comes from without, the women try to de-escalate it through diffusion strategies. The interview and observational data demonstrate that the rationale behind these approaches in dealing with conflict appears to be maintaining interpersonal relationships as mentioned in Gilligan (1982). Bolton (1979) and Robert (1982) also suggest that listening is a prime requisite for building interpersonal skills.

When women initiate conflict, the data indicate that they use a stimulation strategy which promotes escalation toward a specific goal. It is suggested that when women administrators stimulate or initiate conflict, sustaining relationships is the significant thrust behind their behavioral choice, since they are encouraging positive experiences, such as generating new ideas and dispelling apathy.

Diffusion Strategies

In the interview and observation data the women principals manifest a de-escalation or reduction of conflict through diffusion strategies in their conflict management approaches. When conflict is thrust upon them they use diffusion as a response. They demonstrate diffusion in trying to return a tense, hostile situation to a peaceful one. Some of the diffusion strategies they use include empathizing, asking questions and accommodating, using humor, giving the other person a "way out," and listening in order to stop threatening relationships. Not only does this appear compatible with their expressed belief in the partial negative nature of conflict, but it also appears consistent with the maturational development of women along increasingly complex relational lines (Gilligan, 1982; Kaplan and Yasinski, 1984). If conflict can deepen differences, obstruct action, create distrust, and polarize individuals (Lippitt, 1983), then women whose self identity is fostered within a relational conflict may choose to mitigate disagreements in order to maintain interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1982).

Eve expresses her need for diffusion:

> I believe that conflict would keep smoldering as a seething volcano if a problem is not addressed. I would confront it and

immediately try to reduce it.

Edith explains:

> Most problems cry out for closure. I find that I would reduce conflict by confronting it--that is addressing it. I don't want an issue to remain unsettled. If I meet someone in the halls or wherever, I do not want to have an uncomfortable feeling knowing that something must be said.

Emma affirms the use of diffusion:

> It is very necessary to resolve conflict--to obtain closure--so things don't grow out of proportion. Now don't get me wrong. This doesn't mean that I would not allow disagreement. I do think disagreement can be growth-producing.

The need for diffusion seems to appear throughout the responses of the elementary principals. Vis-a-vis this need, they choose a reduction of conflict strategy. In a similar vein, the secondary principals declare the significance of a diffusion strategy choice in conflict. Susan responds:

> Once the issue is addressed I feel the need to reduce any conflict. In fact whenever I intervene I feel that I am reducing conflict. Basically I want to anticipate conflict before it occurs. If I can't, then I want to

eliminate it.

Sally concurs:

> In most cases, conflict is addressed immediately, especially with students. The air should be cleared. Sometimes I do a little homework first--investigate the issue. But my main purpose is to resolve the problem--whatever it is.

Sarah adds:

> Mitigating a controversy is always a goal. I try to do that with all parties involved. In school organization, conflict should be kept to a minimum. The staff and the kids deserve to be happy.

Thus, the interview data of both elementary and secondary principals reveal the tendency toward a reduction strategy in managing conflict because they wish to engender a return to a peaceful milieu.

Observational data provide additional insight into the reduction strategy of the principals. They illuminate the various diffusion strategies utilized by the women administrators.

Empathy

In observed conflict situations Eve appeared to follow her self-description of conflict management choices. During a difference of opinion with a parent over placement of her

children, Eve immediately addressed the problem at a conference consisting of the parent and the children's present teacher, where she attempted to reduce the amount of disagreement by empathizing with the parent.

Eve: Do you have a strong feeling why the twins should be together next year?

Parent: Yes, they need each other. One helps the other, especially _____. I think his brother helps him adjust.

Teacher: I feel that they should be separated because one doesn't help the other who has a separation anxiety--dependent on his mother. He cries every morning coming into the classroom . . . and his brother . . . just keeps playing or talking with the other children.

Parent (excitedly): But once he's in the room it's better for him to be with his brother. I think this makes him feel more comfortable.

Eve: Mrs. _____, speaking to you now as the mother of twin boys myself, I know what you are going through. Let's try this. If each of them can have a buddy of their choice in separate classes next year, we can watch them adjust with a friend. It was very beneficial for my own children. They were able to share

different stories--discuss different teachers.

Parent (calmer): Well--that may be a possibility--I'll think about it and talk to you again. I'm not convinced, but I'll talk to you and think about it some more.

Through her display of empathy with the parent's problem, Eve reduced both the anxiety level of the parent as well as the intensity of disagreement.

Asking Questions and Accommodating

During the conflict situations in which Emma participated, she also utilized a diffusion strategy as described in her interview data. She chose to question the other party involved in conflict and ultimately accommodate him.

One afternoon a parent entered the office to confer with her concerning the school dress code.

Parent (frowning and sounding disturbed): I'm annoyed about my daughter being singled out for wearing a micro-mini skirt to school. She tells me that there is no dress code. If there is a dress code, then everyone should conform . . . and know about the code.

Emma: Mr. _____, please sit down. Let me explain. We have a dress code, unofficial though it may be in our building, because

officially schools are not allowed to have formal codes. However, the faculty, PTA, and the Student Council decided that we would draw up rules for dress in our school. During the winter season there doesn't seem to be a problem adhering to the rules, but in this warm weather, everyone must be reminded of the code.

Parent: When will you institute this? Why wasn't everyone told of this before?

Emma: This afternoon at our faculty meeting all staff will be reminded. Tomorrow morning they will remind their classes of the enforcemeent of the dress code.

Parent: I still am not satisfied. My daughter was reprimanded without warning.

Emma: What would you like me to do?

Parent: I would like you to mention to my daughter that there was no dress code in force at the time that she wore the skirt.

Emma: Would not that be singling her out even more?

Parent: No, I feel that she would understand that only from now on such skirts can't be worn--but my daughter was not wrong in wearing it before everyone was reminded?

Emma: If you would feel better, I think I could accommodate you.

Emma chose to reduce the amount of conflict through asking questions and accommodating the parent.

Humor

On the secondary level, the use of a mitigating or reduction strategy by the principals is manifested. Sarah would diffuse conflict with humor.

One afternoon Sarah perused an overtime sheet which had three hours of overtime for each of four custodians to perform a clean-up operation after a ninety minute evening concert.

Sarah: What? Are these guys out of their minds? How could a short, sweet concert call for all this clean-up assistance? I think I know what's going on here. We have a new head custodian who is not thrilled working for a woman. In fact, he's skeptical of my competence! Let's have some fun. (Sarah calls him to the office).

Sarah: How are you doing, _____?

Custodian: Fine, fine, _____.

Sarah: I was just going over this overtime sheet for the concert and I noticed a request for three hours of overtime for each of four

custodians.

Custodian: My experience in Mr. _____'s school is that concerts cause a lot of garbage. Maybe you're not use to this, but I see this all the time.

Sarah: H-m-m-m. Do you know what you and the other custodians would say if a principal signed this overtime sheet? They'd say: 'Look at that dumb broad. She doesn't know what the hell is going on around here!' Am I right?

Custodian (looking sheepish): Naw, they wouldn't say that, _____.

Sarah: Well to make sure they won't, I'm not going to sign it. (pause)
And please, no more tests of my ability, because I'm a woman.

Custodian (takes the sheet): Gotcha! I'll make out a new one.

Sarah addressed the problem of an excessive overtime request with a reduction strategy by making "light" of what could have been a more serious situation.

Giving the Other Person "A Way Out"

Meanwhile, Susan manifested her tendency to reduce conflict during a meeting with a senior student who had an alcohol problem.

She diffused the situation by offering an alternative.

Susan: I thought this was the "new _____". Where were you on Friday when I called for you?

Student: I was here, but not in the afternoon classes.

Susan: Well, having spoken to other people that I trust, and therefore having known that you are not yet in counseling, I must make the decision not to allow you on the senior trip to Florida.

Student: Oh, shit.

Susan: I think you know where I'm coming from. I have to think of your welfare and the welfare of others. I have no guarantee at all that you will be in control of yourself.

Student: Damn. This is the end of the year. Come on--trust me.

Susan: Based on what? Your past performance? However, if you agree to start counseling and attend the sessions maybe we can talk again. I'm not going to make any more speeches. You know how strongly I feel that counseling is the only way to go for you. Try it.

Student: O. K. I'll think about it.

Susan: Now, you can't think too long. The trip is only one month away. Talk to me soon.

Student: By the end of the week.

Encouraging the student to attend counseling sessions as a prerequisite for the trip, seemed to appease his anger and disappointment and to provide him with "a way out." Susan reduced what could have been a more volatile situation.

Listening: Why Women Principals Listen

The women principals identify listening as another conflict management strategy which tends to de-escalate or diffuse conflict. These administrators listen for a number of reasons, including gathering facts, making the other person feel valuable, allowing people to vent their position, and giving themselves time. Bolton (1979) and Robert (1982) describe listening as one of the most significant components in dissipating negative emotions. Of equal importance is that during the act of listening "the person feels heard or listened to" (Bolton, 1979, p. 221). The aforementioned motivations for listening point toward maintaining interpersonal relationships during conflicts, which is a female-oriented drive as suggested in Gilligan (1982).

Eve explains:

> I try very hard to listen to a person in order to find out a person's priority. It takes time for people to trust you. You have to work at it. Listening is the key. It allows the person to know you are interested in their point of view--you care about what they say.

> It's almost like stepping into the other person's shoes and viewing from their point of view the things they are talking about. This involves understanding another person's feelings. It's difficult, but I try. Only then can dialogue begin.

Emma relates:

> My approach is to listen--to identify the problem--to put it into words. I allow the other person to put their feelings into words. Then I believe in talking with them--in dialogue. I am a people person and I believe in showing people that I'm interested in them--I respect them.

While Edith states:

> I will listen first. I want people to know that I have an underlying reasonableness. As soon as I'm aware of a conflict, I say, 'Let's talk about it now. Tell me what the problem is as you see it.' I want to make the other person comfortable.

Sally explains:

> I give others a chance at input; but when it's time to make a decision or pronounce my view, I must do it, even though it may not be the one that is popular.

Susan expands on this description:

> My approach is to listen very carefully to the other person in order to get as much information as I can. I will question intensely to get all the facts first. Then I'll express my opinion or my rationale concerning the issue. I've mellowed quite a bit over the years. When I first entered administration I took conflict head on. Now I anticipate all consequences first and I listen very carefully.

Sarah discusses her general approach in similar terms:

> My approach is always to listen to an individual. I'll listen to another's position and then try to adjust, but not submit nor surrender mine. Instead, I will continue a dialogue in order to try to find a middle ground, i.e. something that we both can live with.

The principals appear to stress listening skills as their approach because of the importance of maintaining interpersonal relations. Eve and Emma mention that their motivations for listening include trying to understand the other person's position and making the person feel valuable; while Edith, Sarah, and Susan allude to the significance of fact gathering as their reason for listening.

Observational data give credence to the principals' interview responses. For example, in a conflict with her secretary Eve listened patiently to the secretary's explanation of why she abruptly left Eve's office in the middle of a discussion involving her behavior toward a parent.

Secy.: I want to apologize for my walking out the door yesterday. I was annoyed because my first reaction was that you didn't believe my version of what happened with the parent. I thought you doubted me. I lost my temper when I thought that was true. I should not have stormed out of the building.

Eve: I know what you're saying. It's hard to stay calm. Do you understand my position now?

Secy.: Yes, I see that now. I realize that the parent comes first. (She smiles as she continues). That reminds me of a slogan we were asked to memorize when I worked for a department store. In fact, we wore buttons printed with the slogan--'The customer always come first.'

Eve and the secretary both laughed.

Eve: I feel better having discussed that with you.

Secy.: I do too!

Eve: Well, now we can go with our day--much happier than before!

Reflecting on this afterwards, Eve described how positive she felt about the restoration of a good relationship with her secretary. She related: "You know, I'm glad I showed her that I cared about her enough to take the time to listen to her. Both she and I needed that."

In another example, Edith manifested her listening skills one afternoon at dismissal. A parent was screaming over a parking ticket which she received while she left her car to walk into the building to meet her kindergarten child.

Woman (excitedly): Mrs. _____, Mrs. _____. You're the principal. Do something about this. Tell the police department that I was here only two minutes to pick up my daughter in all this rain. You and the school should allow the parents to do this. I want you to do something about this. What can you do? What can you do?

Edith proceeds to speak in a very calm voice as she takes something out of her jacket pocket:

It just so happens that I received a ticket two days ago for doing exactly what you just did, Mrs. _____. So you and I are in the same boat.

Woman (somewhat placated): But, but . . . I

wasn't just parking. I came to the school to get my daughter. It's raining very hard. How can I let her walk? You should do something about this. (Her voice is louder). I won't pay. I am a parent who cares about her child. I'm going to see your boss if you don't do something. Something must be done. This is unjust.

Edith: Mrs. _____, please come to my office tomorrow morning first thing to talk about it. Please. (With that remark said, Edith walked toward another parent who indicated that she wanted to speak with her).

Edith listened patiently during this tirade by a parent. As extreme emotion continued to be displayed, Edith chose to postpone discussion for the present time and suggested a future meeting. Through listening, not only did Edith allow the parent to vent feelings, but also she received information needed.

During a curriculum luncheon meeting with her peers, Emma manifested her listening approach during disagreement. After listening to twenty minutes of dispute among other principals, Emma interjected:

We've heard all the comments. Now let's pull it together. We've seemed to examine all the parts, now let's look at the whole.

Male prin. A: All of us have different

philosophies. As I see it, the whole is mixed.

Emma: What do you think, _____?

Female prin.: I say let's take one year at a time--see what worked and what didn't. I feel we're spending too much time on testing. Are we just teaching kids to regurgitate? Or are we teaching kids to examine?

Emma: What is the statement of philosophy for the elementary schools? We all seem to be living up to it. It's just that our individual mechanics vary within each school. We have something we can give each other regarding scheduling and curriculum.

Male prin. A (interrupting): What are you after, Emma? It sounds to me as though you're trying to placate everyone here. I feel as _____ feels, but as I have said before, all of us have different philosophies, not just mechanics. What you're trying to do won't work.

Emma: I hear you, _____. I'm trying to make allowances for our differences by listening to our approaches and trying to unify them.

Male prin. A: I don't agree with your approach. I believe each of us should do our own thing

according to our own philosophy within our schools. I see too many differences according to our enrollment, make-up, staffing, and point of reference.

Emma: OK. I rest my case for now, but I think we have to continue to discuss this at another time.

Although Emma disagreed with one of the principals, she displayed an interest in the other person's viewpoint by listening to the male principal's position. One of the teachers on her staff describes Emma as follows: "The dignity of the person is her first thrust. She puts up with a lot of things, sometimes, just to listen to others." While this appears to be true from the data, Emma seems to be listening for fact gathering, as well, which is implied in her closing statement: "I rest my case . . . but I think we have to . . . discuss this at another time."

Eve's, Edith's and Emma's behavior reflects their stress on listening in order to make the other person involved in the dispute or disagreement feel valuable and to gather information. Implicit in their responses is the desire to maintain relationships with others.

Observational data of the secondary principals illuminate listening as a conflict management approach.

One morning during a pupil personnel meeting, Sally suggested:

Let's put our heads together on the seventh

grade kids who are failing several subjects. I'm not pleased with what's going on.

Male guidance chair: We've been doing that. Nothing works.

Sally: I refuse to believe nothing works until you tell me what we've done.

Male guidance chair: I've tried contacting parents to encourage support; talking to kids to develop a different attitude; talking to teachers to determine if their standards are achievable. Nothing works. I say let's get new parents.

Sally (not smiling): What else have we done?

Male guidance member: I have spoken to the kids repeatedly, trying to find out what is wrong. The general feeling is that the failing kids--don't seem to care. Maybe we should get new kids.

Sally (not smiling): Any other explanations or suggestions?

Male guidance member: I had a meeting with kids and parents--I'm against a stone wall.

Sally: Well, what we've been doing doesn't work. But it doesn't mean we should give up and maintain the status quo. I say let's get more creative. With the new state mandates we'll

have at least a thirty percent drop out rate; therefore, we must develop a drop out program and alternatives. These kids who are failing and who will fail are not the "label" kids. That's why I want to get a new answer for them.

Sally seemed to listen primarily to obtain facts or ideas from her guidance staff.

Similarly, Sarah manifested listening skills when a parent approached her regarding an incident involving her child in math class.

Female parent (ostensibly agitated and speaking rapidly): What really upsets me is the zero. How could he be given a zero for a test because of talking? He claims that he wasn't talking alone. Several others were talking with him. The teacher did not approach them.

Sarah: Mrs. _____, I'm not certain you have the whole story. Your child did not only talk during the test, but also spoke back to the teacher. The others involved were approached by the teacher and kept quiet.

Parent (calmer): I was not aware of all that.

Sarah: It's not at all uncommon for a teacher to have the rule of giving a zero for talking. In this case, in fact, your child will not

have a zero because it's a math competency test. But on any other classroom test this rule would stand.

The parent appeared relieved and thanked Sarah for her time. Sarah displayed her ability to listen to the parent's concerns in order to allow the parent to vent or express her feelings.

Susan seemed to manifest a listening strategy for similar reasons.

One afternoon a small brush fire broke out in the bleachers behind the school. Susan, immediately rushing out as soon as she was notified, noticed one of the male custodians driving quite rapidly across the field to the bleachers in a pick-up truck. As she stood next to the male assistant principal she said:

What is he doing? He'll kill somebody driving like a crazy person. Tell him to see me after this is taken care of.

As the fire department left the scene and the students and staff walked to their rooms, the custodian ran up to Susan and stated:

I heard you're going to cream me out.

Susan: Tell me, where were you going in such a hurry?

Custodian: I was going to put out the fire.

Susan: Wait a minute--I need some answers. First of all, what about the fire department? Secondly, what about our usual procedures?

Custodian: Well, I thought I should try to

contain the fire before the department arrived. I worry when I see fire. When I was driving I didn't think I was going that fast--maybe I was. But as I said, I saw the fire, I was worried, I wanted to help.

Susan (placing her hand on his shoulder): OK, _____. I appreciate your concern, but please, please think first before you act. Driving as fast you were could have hurt someone just as the fire could.

Custodian: I know . . . . I should have thought more about that.

Although Susan is disturbed at the custodian's manner of driving during the brush fire situation, she allowed him to explain his feelings about fire and made him feel valuable which is implicit in her comment: "I appreciate your concern . . . ."

From the preceding data it appears that Sally, Sarah, and Susan display approaching conflict by listening in order to gather facts, to allow the people to vent their feelings, and to make them feel valuable. These motivations suggest a relationship-oriented behavioral choice, i.e. the women principals wish to preserve relations with others.

In analyzing the aforementioned data, the researcher discovered that although the six women principals listened as a conflict management approach, they did not always end interaction with the other person at that point. Rather, they expressed what

they wanted to say, as well. For example, Sarah did not hesitate to express her position in response to the parent's complaining about her child receiving a zero on a math test, nor did Sally remain unassertive concerning the need for finding alternatives for failing students. Similarly, Emma asserted herself with colleagues in discussing unifying the principals' approaches toward curriculum in her district. In each case, they used listening to gather facts, to give themselves time, to allow the other person to vent feelings, to make the other person feel valuable. All of these motivations pointed toward maintaining interpersonal relationships. In addition to listening, the principals also disclosed their position, suggesting that they perceived self-disclosure or self-assertion as an additional requisite to building interpersonal skills. Therefore, if one mistakes this listening strategy used by women principals as submission or acquiescence, one should note that this is not borne out in the data of this study.

Additional analysis of data disclosed how the women principals listened. In each incident, they gave the other person their undivided attention. Most of the time, there was direct eye contact between the principal and the second party. When the administrator was not looking into the person's eyes, she was viewing the total person, appearing to discern any clues to temperment or disposition.

Robert (1982, p. 49) points to the significance of the manner in which one listens: "The way I listen to the other, look at the

other . . . conveys my respect . . . or disrespect." Perhaps, the attentive manner in which the women principals listened, as suggested in the data, reflects their tendency to preserve interpersonal relationships.

Listening: Why Women Principals Stop Listening

From the interview and observation data there emerged certain issues which intervene to cause the women principals to stop listening. As mentioned previously in this study, women principals listen for certain reasons: to gather facts, to give themselves time, to allow the other person to vent their feelings, to make the other person feel valuable. However, if the women administrators perceive that the situation or the people in it are displaying extreme emotion, they refrain from listening.

Gilligan (1982) and Kaplan and Yasinski (1984) suggest that to refrain from addressing an issue involving emotionality may be attributed to the socio-emotional maturational development of the female along relational lines. Women place an emphasis on interpersonal relationships, receptivity to coworkers' ideas, and the manifestation of concern and helpfulness (Baird and Bradley, 1979; Dalton, 1983). In an extreme emotional setting, women may feel inhibited to address an issue since such a setting may sever interpersonal relationships, and may negate receptivity.

Thus, emotionality appears to be an intervention causing the principals to stop interaction. Their motivation for this strategy includes: lack of control by the other person, fear of

violence, inability to discuss rationally, and changing the context of the situation, i.e. taking control. They view these reasons as important in maintaining relations with the people involved. Because of this rationale, stopping listening is a means to achieving de-escalation of conflict, as suggested in the data.

Eve comments:

> Intense anger frightens me because it shows a person's lack of control. You can't predict what that angry person will do. I will avoid any confrontation or discussion when strong emotions are shown.

Emma continues:

> If extreme emotion is displayed, I would say that we must continue the conference at a later time. We are getting nowhere now. Let's think about what we can do.

Edith mentions:

> I'll allow people to show anger, but I don't like it. I tend to withdraw from the situation. In many instances I might schedule another meeting. I usually can listen for long periods of time while remaining composed; however, I will not sit through ranting and raving.

According to the testimony of the elementary principals, they

would choose not listening whenever extreme emotionality is present. However, they fully intend to address the conflict at a later time. Similarly, one finds this choice of strategy in the secondary principals' responses to the interview questions. Susan states:

> I allow a person to cry or to be angry. But if emotions erupt uncontrollably, I will postpone all conversation to a later time. I'll completely avoid the issue until everyone cools off.

Sarah adds:

> In the face of extreme hostility, I'll withdraw from further discussion. Dialogue can take place only in a rational setting. My tolerance before 'blowing' is very high in an organizational situation. I consider myself a professional and do not take things personally in business.

Sally explains:

> I don't deal with people who rant and rave. I suggest a time to calm down. Problems are not solved as long as people are too emotional about the situation at hand. If the person has built a wall, you're not going to get any reasoning across until they've calmed down.

All of the administrators seem to stop listening if displays

of extreme emotion ensue. They describe this as a "cooling off" technique before continuing the discussion at another time. This technique reflects their own tolerance point in emotional situations, since the female principals discern themselves as possessing high levels of tolerance because they are professionals. It may also reflect the reality and the uselessness of talking to an angry person. The women principals may feel that they have all the facts they need in such situations. The facts suggest to them that the person is too emotional to continue a discussion; therefore, the women administrators stop interaction until they can obtain more facts.

In addition, the women administrators may stop listening because of their fear of violence as illustrated in Eve's comment: "Intense anger frightens me because this shows a lack of control."

Observational data affirms the principals' perceptions of their refraining from listening in cases of extreme emotionality.

One afternoon a female teacher entered Eve's office visibly angry.

Teacher (speaking loudly): I am greatly disturbed that you have not responded to my letter. I expected you would do so by now.

Eve: I had not written one because your letter was a response to mine and did not seem to require any further comment.

Teacher (yelling): But you undermined my

> authority as a classroom teacher. You concealed a complaint that you had solicited from a parent; you ignored my response to the parent; you have been constantly harassing me by observing me. When will this all stop?! I demand an answer. I'm seeing a lawyer. (Screaming and crying).
>
> Eve (standing and visibly shaken): Please, let's talk about this later. You are out of control now.

Following this scene, Eve explained the details concerning this teacher who was transferred to Eve's school after receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation from a principal in another school. Significantly, Eve displayed the strategy of stopping listening in the face of extreme emotion. When the researcher inquired why she postponed any further discussion, Eve responded:

> Because I absolutely cannot think when a person is yelling at me . . . and more than that I am afraid of extreme anger because it shows lack of control.

Similarly, Edith manifested postponement of discussion in the illegal parking incident with a screaming parent. As related previously in this study, the principal walked toward another parent after suggesting that the person out of control confer with her at another time. Edith explains her actions as follows: "I cannot talk with an irrational person."

Observational data corroborates interview data concerning the secondary principals' display of not listening when extreme emotions exist.

One morning during a parent conference in Sarah's office the discussion grew quite heated on the part of a parent.

Parent (talking loudly and adamantly): I cannot believe that you will not place my son with another teacher. He's being ruined by this teacher. I don't want him to spend one more day in that room.

Sarah: As I told you before, your son was involved in an incident incurring the wrath of the teacher and justly so. I have spoken to the teacher and your son. Now, we must go through a period of waiting and trusting.

Parent (very agitated): I don't believe in it--I don't want him there and if you don't move him I'm going to your boss.

Sarah (calmly): Let me give you his number if you feel that will solve the issue. I'm suggesting that we continue this conversation in a day or two. It will give everyone more time.

At that point, the parent walked out of the office. Two days later Sarah learned from her secretary that he made another appointment to see her, without contacting the superintendent with

whom Sarah discussed the matter. In a discussion with Sarah afterward, she related:

> I absolutely refuse to talk to a person who is yelling. I must change the scene, so I have control. If I were to continue during the rampage, there may be a permanent break between the parent and myself.

The women principals did not manifest responding to extreme anger with anger during the observation period. Whether or not they ever demonstrate this strategy in their work environment may be a suggestion for further research. However, when faced with strong emotionality women principals choose to stop listening as their strategy of conflict management in order to de-escalate the situation.

Escalation Strategies

Stimulation:

The interview and observation data demonstrate a second type of conflict which portrays the women principals' capabilities to escalate conflict when is is initiated by them. They accomplish this by stimulating or instigating conflict. The significant force behind this stimulation strategy remains the preservation of interpersonal relationships, since their motivations

appear to be encouraging positive experiences, such as dispelling apathy and generating new ideas.

Eve expresses her thinking concerning stimulation:

> Only at staff meetings would I try a stimulation technique. This might be to obtain new ideas or prevent staff members from falling asleep--or if there was boredom or apathy.

Edith explains:

> I might play devil's advocate and stimulate disagreement at a staff meeting in order to encourage more thinking. That would be the only time I would use this.

Emma states:

> I would encourage discussion and disagreement when I want to obtain different ideas at a faculty meeting. However, I would use this cautiously.

Susan responds:

> Now, if I want to generate any thinking at a meeting, I'll tell my staff up front that I'm encouraging controversy. I don't beat around bushes. I'm candid with them--that's my style.

Sally responds:

> I would only induce disagreement at a staff

> meeting in order to dispel apathy. Sometimes I take an opposing position to see if it flies with the group or if it increases involvement of the staff.

Sarah adds:

> I might stimulate disagreement at a meeting--maybe to increase creative thinking--but I would do that only with caution.

Thus, the interview data of both elementary and secondary principals reveal a cautious and limited use of a stimulation of controversy strategy based on the criterion of the need to generate creative thinking or dispel apathy.

Observational data sheds additional light on the stimulation strategy of conflict management, which three of the principals used during the researcher's time frame.

At a staff meeting of six female Kindergarten teachers, two female principals, and a female administrative assistant to the superintendent, Eve displayed the use of a stimulation strategy to expose pitfalls in the lines of communication from the central office to the building adminstrators. The need to generate alternate ideas seemed to be the determining factor of the use of this strategy.

The administrative assistant opened the meeting and addressed Eve: Any suggestions on moving a Kindergarten to all day?

Eve: At the discretion of the child study team

and teacher input, and age cut off. These should be the criteria. I also think that the half day Kindergarten teachers should be given a round of applause. (Everyone clapped).

Ad. Asst.: I'll bring that up at our next principals' meeting. I don't want to get into that here. Now--regarding screening. It's not the sole responsibility of the Kindergarten teacher.

Eve: No. My core skills coordinator does it.

Ad. Asst.: We'll discuss that at the next principals' meeting.

Eve: I think that we should establish a procedure for testing in all the schools--the who, the when, the where.

Ad. Asst.: We'll bring it up at the next principals' meeting. (Everyone quiet).

Eve: Why can't we toss around several ideas now?

Ad. Asst.: We have no time now.

Eve: O. K. How much aide time does a full time Kindergarten teacher get?

Ad. Asst.: Two hours.

Eve: I'm amazed! I can't give my Kindergarten teachers two hours.

Ad. Asst.: It was allotted to every building. It came down as a directive.

Eve: But I only know what I receive from the Superintendent's office. I guess I'll have to bring it up at the next principals' meeting. (Some chuckles were heard).

A Kindergarten teacher, who was President of the Teachers' Union, spoke:

Why don't you actively invite more principals to come to this meeting?

Eve: Here, Here!

Ad. Asst. (shrugs shoulders): It's an open meeting.

Eve: That caught you off guard didn't it? How do the rest of you feel?

The teachers nodded approval. Several of them commented further about the powerlessness of these meetings if action cannot be taken. The outcome was that the administrative assistant was asked to formally invite all principals to future meetings and to follow through on dispersements of directives from the central office to each building administrator.

Emma manifested a stimulation strategy at one of her meetings with her peers.

Male principal A: I see a definite problem if we do not incorporate the directors of curriculum in teacher evaluation at some point. I'd like to see them co-write an evaluation sheet with the principal.

Emma: Couldn't the same results be achieved in different ways? One of the highlights of the music director is that he has a personal touch with each music teacher. Could not he talk to the teacher in his own inimitable way if he notices flaws? I would like directors to observe teachers, but I do not want them writing up an evaluation.

Male principal B: If a teacher is observed by a director, then it's imperative to include what he has observed in the evaluation.

Emma: I disagree with you. I'm not ready to relinquish the right of a principal to evaluate a teacher.

Female principal: I agree with Emma. Only one person should have the final word on the status of a teacher--and that person should be the principal.

Male principal A: What about two signatures on the evaluation form?

Emma: The prime responsibility of the principal is staff performance. I wish to preserve it.

Male principal B: I say that at the very least the director should have a paragraph on the evaluation sheet.

Emma: As soon as you do that, you're

relinquishing your responsibility to evaluate teachers.

Male principal B: I don't see it that way at all. I see it as sharing your responsibility with someone who has expertise in a particular field.

Emma: Once you share a right--it's gone.

Female principal: That's right. We've all seen it happen before.

The meeting concluded with a suggestion to investigate the position of the senior high school principals concerning this issue. Any decision on the inclusion of directors regarding teacher evaluations was postponed pending the above information. In discussing her role with her after the conference, the researcher discovered that Emma wanted to make certain all principals realized the implications of sharing evaluation responsibilities with the directors. She wished more ideas to surface on how this would occur, which is her rationale for stimulating disagreement at that meeting.

At a bi-monthly informal faculty meeting held in her office, Susan displayed a stimulation strategy. She orchestrates these meetings of chosen staff members in order to provide an opportunity for an open forum of conflicting viewpoints. The arrangement of these meetings in itself may be considered part of the stimulation strategy, since she appears to prefer "bringing things out in the open to try to clear the air" when she perceives

that undercurrents of conflict exist. The faculty is aware of her rationale behind the meetings and cooperates with the procedure.

One afternoon during an informal meeting of six faculty members, composed of two white males, three white females, and one black female, Susan's strategy surfaced.

White male teacher 1: I'd like to clarify our policy concerning the length of shorts that should be worn.

Susan: Provocative--distracting is the key. Mid-thigh is the guideline. Two years ago I met with the kids and decided to draw up guidelines we both could live with. Mid-thigh was agreed upon. Technically a dress code is not legal--but this is something the kids and us have worked out unofficially. If there's a transgression I or you could say, 'If I see you wearing that again I'll send you home.'

Black female teacher: Mid-thigh is still a problem.

Susan: How do you see it as a problem?

Black female teacher (looking at male teacher): With heavy girls and what about see-through tops and short midriff tops?

Susan: If we truly believe outfits are distracting that's the time we can send them home, after reminding them.

Black female teacher: I don't go for reminding them. They know this code. I say we should send them home to change clothes as we see them.

Susan: Reminders are usually the way to go--especially when warm weather hits so suddenly. Is there something else bothering you?

Black female teacher: Well-yes, there is. Some male teachers do not follow through on this unofficial dress code. (She is now glaring at male teacher 1.) They enjoy looking at abbreviated clothing . . . .

White male teacher 2: Certain hostilities seem to be showing again. I think most of us make an effort not to be so crude. I feel that you're being too sensitive, _____.

Susan: Wait a minute, _____. Go ahead, _____.

Black female teacher: All I'm saying is--if there's a code or guidelines then we all should follow it and give all students good example. There shouldn't be a double standard for girls and boys--or for blacks and whites!

White male teacher 1: Are you accusing anyone of doing this?

Black female teacher: I've watched you and listened to you, _____. I don't like it. I

want it to stop.

Through her confidants, Susan knew of racist and sexist overtones expressed by some members of the staff toward the students which she mentioned to the researcher after the meeting. Therefore, not only did she invite the teachers involved in this issue to face each other at a conference, but also she provided the black female teacher with several opportunities to address the group that afternoon by asking lead questions and by running interference.

From the preceding data one may observe that women principals use several strategies which seem to be generated by interpersonal drives. First of all, when conflict is thrust upon them, they respond by de-escalating it through diffusion strategies. These strategies tend to reduce conflict and promote a return to harmonious relationships. Secondly, when they initiate conflict, the women administrators appear to escalate it through instigation or stimulation because they perceive a need to generate creative thinking or to eliminate apathy. The motivation behind this strategy remains the maintainance of interpersonal relationships, since the principals desire to improve thinking within a group.

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